<u>WHAT IS CLAIMED IS</u>:

1.   A computer-implemented method of assisting users in locating products within an online catalog of products of a merchant web site, the method comprising:

tracking electronic referrals of customers from an associate web site to the merchant web site;

maintaining customer-specific histories of at least one type of browsing activity that evidences customers' interests in particular products in the online catalog;

identifying a community of customers, including customers who are deemed to share a common interest by virtue of having been referred to the merchant web site from the associate web site; and

analyzing the customer-specific histories of at least members of the community to identify a set of products that, based upon predefined criteria, are deemed to be popular within the community.

2.   The method as in Claim 1 further comprising presenting information relating to the set of products to a user of the associate web site.

3.   The method as in Claim 2, wherein the information is displayed within the associate web site.

4.   The method as in Claim 1 further comprising presenting information relating to the set of products to a user of the merchant web site.

5.   The method as in Claim 1, wherein the associate web site is substantially related to the common interest.

6.   The method as in Claim 1, wherein identifying a community of customers comprises including within the community customers referred from at least two different associate web sites.

7.   The method as in Claim 1, wherein identifying a community of customers comprises including within the community a customer who was not referred to the merchant web site from an associate site but who has otherwise indicated an interest in the common interest.

8.   The method as in Claim 1, wherein the customer-specific histories include histories of products purchased.

9.   The method as in Claim 1, wherein the customer-specific histories include histories of products viewed during browsing of the online catalog.

10.　　The method as in Claim 1, wherein the customer-specific histories include at least one of purchase histories, product viewing histories, shopping cart selection histories, product rating histories, and product bidding histories.

11.　　The method as in Claim 1, wherein analyzing the customer-specific histories comprises comparing a popularity of the product within the community to a popularity of the product within a general customer population.

12.　　The method as in Claim 1, wherein presenting the set of products to a user of the associate web site comprises displaying the set of products within a page of the associate web site.

13.　　The method as in Claim 1, wherein presenting the set of products to a user of the associate web site comprises displaying the set of products within a page of the merchant web site when the user is referred to the merchant web site.

14.　　The method as in Claim 13, wherein the page is a product detail page of the online catalog.

15.　　A method of relating a customer to a community based at least upon the customer's interaction with an associate web site, wherein the customer selects a referral link in an associate web site and is directed to a web site system:

　　　　providing a database which includes information about a plurality of communities, wherein the communities are related to associates and the associates operate associate web sites that refer customers to a web site system;

　　　　receiving a referral message from an associate web site, wherein the referral message is generated in response to a selection by the customer of a referral link of the associate web site;

　　　　extracting the associate identifier from the referral message; and

　　　　using an associate identifier extracted from the referral message and the database to identify at least one community that relates to the customer.

16.　　The method of Claim 15, wherein the associates operate associate web sites that refer customers to the web site system in exchange for compensation.

17.　　The method of Claim 15 further comprising:

　　　　storing the at least one community that relates to the customer in a customer community database.

18.　　The method of Claim 15 further comprising:

assigning the customer to at least one community.

19.   The method of Claim 18 further comprising:

providing content associated with the at least one community to the customer.

5   20.   The method of Claim 19, wherein providing content associated with the at least one community to the customer includes pushing the content to the associate web site.

21.   A method of creating a database of community recommendations, wherein the database is used to assist customers in selecting items from an electronic

10   catalog of items accessible via an online store, the method comprising:

providing a first database which includes information about a plurality of communities, wherein different communities relate to subsets of customers based at least upon associate web sites visited by the customers and the associate web sites are run by associates who refer customers to the online store;

15   tracking at least a portion of the customers' online activity in the online store to generate activity history data, and storing the activity history data in a computer memory;

processing at least the activity history data and the first database to identify at least one item which, based on pre-specified criteria, has become

20   popular within a particular community; and

storing the relationship between the at least one item and the community.

22.   The method of Claim 21, wherein the associates refer customers to the online store in exchange for compensation.

23.   The method of Claim 21 further comprising:

25   electronically notifying members of the community that the at least one item is popular within the community.

24.   The method of Claim 21, wherein the online activity includes at least one of purchases, click-throughs, and additions to shopping carts.

25.   The method of Claim 21, wherein electronically notifying members of

30   the community comprises generating a web page which includes a community-based most popular items list.

26.   The method of Claim 25, wherein the most popular items list is a bestsellers list.

27.   The method of Claim 21, wherein electronically notifying members of the community comprises automatically generating and sending an email message to members of the community.

28.   The method of Claim 27, wherein the email message includes contact information of at least one member of the community that has purchased an item described in the email message.

29.   A method of assisting a customer in selecting items from an electronic catalog of items of an online store, wherein the online store provides services for enabling the customer to browse items from the electronic catalog, the method comprising:

        providing a community database which includes information about communities and their related customers;

        receiving a customer identifier that corresponds to a customer;

        processing the customer identifier to identify at least one community that is related to the customer;

        providing a community recommendation database which includes information about communities and the items that are popular within the respective communities;

        using the at least one community that is related to the customer and the community recommendation database to identify at least one item that is popular within the at least one community; and

        electronically presenting the at least one item to the customer.

30.   The method of Claim 29, wherein electronically presenting the at least one item includes presenting a web page with a link to a web page that corresponds to the at least one item.

31.   A method of assisting associates running web sites in selecting items to offer to customers in the associates' web sites, the method comprising:

        providing a first database which includes information about a plurality of communities, wherein different communities relate to subsets of customers based at least upon associate web sites visited by the customers;

tracking at least a portion of the customers' online activity in an online store to generate activity history data, and storing the activity history data in a computer memory;

processing at least the activity history data and the first database to identify at least one item which, based on pre-specified criteria, has become popular within a particular community; and

storing the relationship between the at least one item and the community.

32.   The method of Claim 31, further comprising:

electronically notifying associates of items that are popular within at least one community to which the associates are related.

33.   The method of Claim 31, further comprising:

providing a second database which includes information about the associates and their related communities; and

using the associate community database to identify at least one community to which an associates is related.

using the associate community database and the community recommendation database to identify at least one item that is popular within at least one community to which the associate is related.

34.   An electronic commerce system, comprising:

a merchant web site comprising an electronic catalog of products;

an associate web site that provides at least one link to the merchant web site to refer users to the merchant web site;

a first program module which is responsive to referrals of users from the associate web site to the merchant web site by assigning such users to a community; and

a second program module which analyzes histories of activities performed users while browsing the merchant web site to identify products that are popular within the community.

35.   The electronic commerce system of Claim 34, wherein the associate web site includes content associated with a subset of the products in the electronic catalog.

36.   The electronic commerce system of Claim 34, wherein the at least one link comprises a banner ad link.

37.   The electronic commerce system of Claim 34, further comprising a third program module that pushes information about the products that are popular within the community to the associate web site for display therein.